

VZCZCXR06763
PP RUEHIK RUEHPOD RUEHYG
DE RUEHVB #0916 2771501
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 041501Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8204
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ZAGREB 000916

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR, EUR/SCE
USNATO FOR JONES, UNDERWOOD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [HR](#) [DEFENSE](#) [REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: NEW POLL SHOWS CONTINUED GROWTH IN NATO SUPPORT

REF: A. ZAGREB 618

[¶](#)B. ZAGREB 593

[¶](#)C. ZAGREB 395 AND PREVIOUS

[¶](#)11. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: A poll contracted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) shows a continued rise in public support for NATO membership. In a Post-organized briefing to NATO-member embassies on October 2, IRI representatives highlighted a 10 percent increase in support for Croatia's Alliance membership since their last regular poll in April 2007. Respondents in favor of membership rose to 48 percent while opposition dropped to 43 percent. When adjusted to reflect only respondents willing to vote in a potential NATO referendum, support climbed to 56 percent and opposition dipped to 41. IRI-organized polls have consistently shown lower levels of support than GoC-sponsored polling due to various methodological differences but are widely considered to be a more reliable measure of public opinion. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

CLEAR POSITIVE TREND BUT PUBLIC STILL FEELS UNINFORMED

[¶](#)12. Poll results, based on 3,000 face-to-face interviews conducted throughout the country from August 17 to September 17, indicate clear growth in public backing for NATO accession, showing a 17 percent rise from the February 2007 low of 31 and opposition 18 points down from its historic high of 61. Equally encouraging was relatively consistent support across major political parties, with 56 percent of ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) voters and 51 percent of opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) supporters favoring NATO. SDP support is particularly important, showing that members have not confused party leader Zoran Milanovic's calls for a referendum on NATO accession with opposition to Croatia's membership.

[¶](#)13. The general public, however, still feels poorly informed about the costs and benefits of NATO membership. Despite intense GoC efforts, only 19 percent of Croatians feel well or very well informed about NATO. That figure remains unchanged over the past year. According to the poll, many Croatians also continue to view NATO as a servant of USG foreign policy interests and believe membership will increase the risk of terrorist attacks.

HDZ NARROWING SDP LEAD IN ELECTION RUN-UP

[¶](#)14. Regarding the popularity of political parties, the poll showed HDZ closing the gap on SDP before parliamentary elections next month. At nearly 27 percent, HDZ is just three points behind the SDP, a statistical dead heat given the poll's margin of error. Other trends, such as voters' perceptions of the government, are also improving for the HDZ, but their performance on such issues as unemployment and

corruption remain key vulnerabilities.

¶ 5. The full polling presentation will be provided to EUR/SCE via email and will be available on Post's SIPRNet site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/zagreb/>.
BRADTKE